DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 226 SO 023 172

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TITLE From Puggy to Larry: Poetry from "Gathering Light."
INSTITUTION Midwest Philosophy of Education Society.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Midwest Philosophy of Education Society (Chicago, IL, November 14, 1992).
AVAILABLE FROM Midwest Philosophy of Education Society, 5006 West Grace Street, Chicago, IL 60641-3450 ($10).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Creative Works (Literature,Drama,Fine Arts) (030)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childhood Attitudes; *Cognitive Development; Creative Writing; Developmental Stages; Educational Development; *Educational Philosophy; *Parent Child Relationship; *Poetry; *Preadolescents
IDENTIFIERS *Childhood Experiences; Egan (Kieran)

ABSTRACT

This paper contains a poetry reading presented to a meeting on poetic narrative and educational development. The presentation was based on the theory that the field of philosophy of education should include the realm of the possible as created and populated by the imagination, and often portrayed by works of art. The poems consist of attempts to represent childhood experiences from a child's point of view. They are poetic representations of a phenomenology of preadolescent cognitive development. Through the series of eight poems, the child (Puggy) becomes the little boy (Larry) by becoming able to distinguish self from other and advancing from a mythic to a romantic stage of development. A warning is included to the effect that the attempt to impose such adult terminology on this poetry may be destructive of the poet's work. Also included is a work in progress, a piece of prose that begins from an adult point of view when a morning brings back memories of long ago and childhood games. The poems are narrated by either Puggy the child, Larry the boy, or the poet as an adult. Each narrator could be identified as one of Kieran Egan's four stages of educational development. The mythic stage is identified with Puggy and encompasses the ages 4 through 10. The romantic stage is identified with Larry and ages 9 through 15. The philosophic state is represented by the poet and ages 14 through 20. The final ironic stage is ages 19 and over. (DK)

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FROM PUGGY TO LARRY

Poetry From Gathering Light

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS: "From Puggy to Larry."

Program: Sixth Concurrent Session #1, Midwest Philosophy of Education Society, 14 November 1992.....p3

Proposal to the Program Committee, 29 July 1992.....p4

BABY TALK.....p5

NANNA.....p7

THAT NAME.....p9

FACTS OF LIFE.....p10

MAGICS.....p15

IN THE ATTIC.....p17

DANCER.....p19

THE MAIN THING.....p20

Appendix: WORK IN PROGRESS (1965).....p25

Program: Midwest Philosophy of Education Society:
Sixth Concurrent Session #1: Loyola University Chicago,
Marquette Center 30, 10 - 10:45 a.m., 14 November 1992.

"FROM PUGGY TO LARRY": POETRY FROM GATHERING LIGHT.
A poetry reading by Lawrence Santoro.

Mr. Santoro is a published poet, a teacher of creative writing, and a director of educational theatre. He is employed by the Chicago Headline Club as Director of their famous Gridiron Show.

I. Introduction: Poetic Narrative and Educational Development, by Michael A. Oliker, Midwest PES.

II. Poetry Reading.

1. Baby Talk.	Narrator: "Author."
2. Nanna.	N: "Puggy"
3. That Name.	N: "Author"
4. Facts of Life.	N: Author / Larry / Puggy.
5. Magics.	N: "Puggy"
6. In the Attic.	N: "Larry."
7. Dancer.	N: "Larry"
8. The Main Thing.	N: Puggy / Larry.

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Appendix I: Kieran Egan's Four Stages of Educational Development.
A. Mythic Stage: Ages 4-10 (Puggy?)
B. Romantic Stage: Ages 9-15 (Larry?)
C. Philosophic State: Ages 14-20 (Author?)
D. Ironic Stage: Ages 19+ (Is this possible?)

Appendix II: Bibliography.

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Nyberg, David and Kieran Egan. "Toward an Educational Theory." Chap. in The Erosion of Education. New York: Teachers College Press, 1981.
Santoro, Lawrence P. "Work in Progress." Essence (Kutztown, Pennsylvania) 6, no. 2 (May 1965): 26-31.
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29 July 1992

4

To: Program Committee, Midwest Philosophy of Education Society
From: Michael A. Oliker, Member, Executive Committee
Subject: Proposal for Poetry Reading by Lawrence Santoro

In his brief presentation to MPES in 1990, Harry S. Broudy suggested that "philosophy of education could claim as its territory the realm of the possible as created and populated by the imagination, and often portrayed by works of art . . . ." William Russell's paper at the 1991 meeting on "Poetry for Philosophers of Education" was a step in the direction suggested by Broudy. With this in mind, I contacted Mr. Santoro -- an actor, director, and poet who has done many public readings here in Chicago -- and asked him to consider submitting a proposal for a poetry reading at the 1992 meeting of MPES. I believe that many of his poems would be of interest to MPES members because they consist of attempts to represent childhood experiences from a child's point of view. To use some rather technical jargon, I would describe these poems as poetic representations of a phenomenology of pre-adolescent cognitive development. The child Puggy becomes the little boy Larry by becoming able to distinguish self from other and advancing from a Mythic to a Romantic stage of development. (Of course this is to impose an adult terminology that may be destructive of Santoro's work.)

Mr. Santoro majored in philosophy at Albright College in Reading, Pennsylvania and completed a degree in theatre at Temple University. He did graduate work in theatre at Villanova. Santoro has directed theatrical productions at the elementary, secondary, and college levels and was an actor, writer, and director for a syndicated TV series. Currently, he is theatre columnist for a group of neighborhood newspapers in Chicago and is director of the Chicago Headline Club's annual Gridiron Show.

The proposed presentation could be squeezed into a 50-60 minute session. Santoro would like to read for 20-25 minutes. I would offer a brief commentary (8-10 minutes) as a basis for discussion. This should leave 15-20 minutes for discussion.

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Michael A. Oliker, 5006 W. Grace St., Chicago, IL 60641.
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BABY TALK

SOON THE WORLD IS MAGIC PLACED.

WHEN HUNGER'S FILLED,
AND COLD DISSOLVES TO WARM DOWN 'ROUND YOUR TUMMY,

WHEN HARD DEFLATES TO SOFT
AND SHINY BRIGHT BECOMES A MUTED PASTEL MURMUR;

THEN THE MAGICS START...
AND THE WORLD BEGINS TO HAVE AN ORDER
AND STRETCHES, CONNECTED, OUT FOREVER.

THE ONLY LAW THAT WORLD WILL HAVE IS MAGIC, THEN.

YOU WILL SEE SUCH WONDROUS THINGS THAT TICKLE YOU FOR EXPLICATION...

YOU'LL WONDER WHY...THAT MAN IN KILT AND TARTAN SASH STANDS UPON YOUR CORNER IN THE SUN

AND PIPES HIS WHEEZING SCREAM-BAG

AND FOR HIS MUSIC, THERE, BITES AND DRIBBLES DOWN HIS CHIN,
A RIPE TOMATO OFFERED HIM, STREAMING JUICE AND SEEDS AND GRINS.

YOU'LL WONDER WHY THE STAIRWAY CREAKS BELOW
WHEN YOU'RE ALONE, ABOVE

OR THE PHONE RINGS ONCE A NIGHT THEN WAITS -- UNTIL TOMORROW NIGHT.

YOU'LL WONDER WHAT THEY DO IN THERE -- THE DRY OLD WOMEN IN THE CORNER HOUSE ALL BUSHY-DARK AND SHADOW-CURTAINED.

WHERE THE GRASS IS LONG AND WEEDY AND EATS FOREVER THE ROLLING BALL, THE ILL-TOSSED TOY;

WHAT THEY DO WITH TWIGGY FINGERS WHEN THEY PART THE DRAPES LIKE DUSTY BREEZE WITHIN
AND PARCHMENT EYES LEAN OUT TO GRAB YOUR SOUL RUNNING PAST TO WARMER NEIGHBORS...

REMEMBER THE TERRORS, THEY ARE HOLY.
KEEP THEM CLOSE TO HAND, IN MIND.

WHEN NIGHT IS FILLED WITH GLIMMER GLAMOUR,

AND THE SHADOWS BREATHE WHERE THE ALLEY BENDS DOWN INTO ETERNITY

AND THE BRANCHES TAP THE WINDOWPANE

AND THE STAIRS ARE DARK AT TOP

AND THE HALLWAY CREAKS DOWN THERE;

WHEN THE CLOSET FILLS WITH MONSTERS

AND THAT DEAD SPACE BETWEEN THE BED AND WALL BESEEMS
A CAVE OF DREAD-SCALED AND SPINY FEASTING-BEASTS;

WHEN STORIES, BOOKS AND NIGHT-TOLD TALES
BECOME THE WORLD AND WALK IN YOU THROUGH STREETS YOU'LL WALK,
FOREVER...

REMEMBER: TIME IS NOT A RIVER BUT A PUDDLE, RATHER
WHICH GROWS DOWN AND DEEPER AS YOU GET LONGER

AND THEY'RE THERE, BELOW;
YOUR SHADOW BROTHER TERRORS...

HOLD THEM, KEEP THEM HOLY,

THEY, SADLY, DO NOT LAST FOREVER

BUT HOLD THE MAGIC IN YOUR HEAD.

IT WILL BE YOUR MIND, YOUR SOUL
AND BEST FRIEND, LATER.

WHEN THE COLD RETURNS AND ALL THE WITCHES, DEAD.

NANNA

LATER, I NOTICED THE PICTURE ON THE MANTLE IN MY PARENT'S HOUSE.

FRAME OF METAL, CURLS AND CARTOUCHES,
ENCLOSING THAT WOMAN, THAT LADY IN WHITE.

THAT LONG WHITE FEMALE LINE AGAINST HER TAPESTRY OF STAGS AND HOUNDS.

I KNEW IT WAS NANNA BUT HAD NEVER SEEN HER BEFORE LIKE THIS.

POP-POP HAD BEEN CUT FROM THE PICTURE
HAD LEFT HER LONG AND ALONE, HER HAND DRIFTED OFF AT THE FINGER-TIPS WHERE HE ONCE SAT SOME 40 YEARS GONE.

I KNEW IT WAS NANNA BUT IT WAS NOT THE NANNA I KNEW.

THAT OLD WOMAN, THINNED BY LIFE, DRIED FROM WHITE TO ASH;

THAT OLD WOMAN, ICICLE-HARD, THUMP ON THE BOTTOM AND OFF TO THE PRICKLY CHAIR
TO WAIT THE TICK-TOCK STICKLY HOUR TIL DADDY RETURNS TO DEAL WITH ME.

THIS NANNA WAS WHITE AND SOFT AND GLOWED IN SILVER NITRATE HAZE
OF DUST AND YEARS,
OF DUST AND YEARS BEFORE MY BIRTH.

THIS WAS NOT THE NANNA WHO DIED IN MY HAND,
HER FINGER TWIGS WRAITHED AROUND MY PLUMPING KNUCKLES,
HER HANDS SOBBING SLOWLY UNTO SILENCE.

SUNDAY MORNING. DOWNSTAIRS, POP-POP IN THE KITCHEN. GABRIEL HEATER ON THE RADIO.
I, DRESSED FOR CHURCH BUT NOT READY FOR IT.

"COME, PUGGY. DON'T DAWDLE. TAKE MY HAND AND STOP ACTING LIKE AN I DONOWHAT. GOODNESS!"

THEN DOWN TWO STEPS.
PUMPING MY HAND. "OH, OH, OH, LARRY! I CAN'T SEE. CAN'T HEAR."
TWITCHING, WRITHING. WORDS SLIDING INTO NOISES, NOISES GOING FUNNY IN THE THROAT.
TWITCH. WRITHE. BANG, BANG, THE HEAD AGAINST THE WALL.

FUNNY, NANNA. NANNA BEING FUNNY. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE. NANNA WAS FUNNY.

I RAN TO POP-POP AND GABRIEL HEATER TO TELL: NANNA IS FUNNY, FINALLY FUNNY.

NOW NANNA WAS NEVER FUNNY. NOT NANNA.
NANNA OF THE DAINTY DISHES, OF DOILIES DELICATE.

NOT AT CARSONIA PARK WHERE THE ROLLER COASTER ROLLED WITHOUT ME.

"GOODNESS! ON THAT THING! I HEAR A MAN LOST HIS HEAD IN THE AIR
UP THERE WHERE HE STOOD TO SHOW OFF."
SHEARED BY THE "DON'T STAND" SIGN.

BUT NANNA WAS BEING FUNNY NOW!

OF COURSE, BY THEN, MY PARENTS HAD HEARD THE BEATING ON THE
STAIRS
AND THE FUNNY OLD WOMAN, MY MOTHER'S MOTHER, BEING FUNNY
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HER SON'S LIFE.

POP-POP OUT OF THE KITCHEN THROUGH THE HOUSE AND UP THE STAIRS.
ALL OF US MEETING THERE TWO STEPS FROM THE TOP
TO WATCH NANNA'S FUNNY.

I SAW MY POP-POP'S FACE. ONLY THAT, HIS NOSE AND JOWLS AND EYES.
"YOU STOP THAT, NOW. YOU STOP THAT, HEAR!"

FUNNY NANNA.

DOCTOR KOTZEN CAME AND WENT. NANNA STAYED.
LAID IN THE CENTER OF HER BED. HER BED WITH POP-POP.
SHE SLEPT. MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY.

WATCHED HER BREATHE.
THEN STOP.

AND, WORRIED ABOUT LAUGHING AT THE VIEWING, I BIT MY CHEEKS HARD
INSIDE MY MOUTH...BUT DID LAUGH A LITTLE.

EVEN THOUGH I HAD KILLED HER, I COULD STILL FEAR LAUGHTER.

POP-POP SAID, "NANNA WAS DYING AND YOU WAS LAUGHING,"
POP-POP SAID.

GOODNESS! NANNA WOULD HAVE SAID. GOODNESS.

BUT NOT THAT BEAUTY ON THE MANTLE, THAT WHITE, ELEGANT SILVER
LINE OF A WOMAN WHO SMILED FROM FORTY YEARS GONE AT THE SNOWY
PENNSYLVANIA MOUNTAINS OVER MY SHOULDER.

NOT THAT WOMAN. HER WORD WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN GOODNESS.

I COULD LOVE HER, THAT WOMAN ON THE MANTLE. HONEST TO GOD, I
COULD.

AND I COULD FORGIVE HER FOR BEING FUNNY NANNA WHOM I KILLED
ONE SUNDAY ON OUR STAIRS WITH MY LAUGHTER.

THAT NAME

DEEP DOWN IN THERE, I'M STILL MY FAMILY'S NAMETHING: PUGGY;

THOUGH I NEVER UNDERSTOOD THE WHY OF IT

OR WHAT IT MEANT, I'M PUGGY, STILL...

AT THE CALL OF OTHERS, OLDER, WISER, STRONGER THAN I CAN EVER BE

IN SOUL, IN MIND, IN TIME IN FACT...

I AM PUGGY, THEN AND NOW.

THE KID IN SAILOR SUIT

WHO RUNS IN SCRATCHY BLACK AND FLARING WHITE

AMONG PENDORA'S TREES IN FLICKER-SHADES OF GRAY,

AND STANDS ON TEETER FEET BESIDE THE WATERFALL

AND YEARNS TO DIVE ON IN AND DOWN AND THROUGH THE FOAM

TO SWIM AWAY, THE WATER'S WAY...

FLOWING UNDERGROUND...

BUT STOPS AND TURNS AND WAVES AND SMILES AT SOMEONE UP AHEAD.

AND WAITS.

THEN, SNATCHED ON UP BY MOTHER'S ARMS,

IS SAVED.

FACTS OF LIFE

AFTER LOVE AND THE LONG GIGGLE-MAKING, SHRIVEL-TICKLE OUT OF HER;

AFTER HOLDING,
OUR SEPARATE BEAUTIES SALTED WITH THE TASTE OF MEMORY,

AND THE SLOW EXFOLIATION OF OUR SKINS,
BREASTS AND THIGHS, BELLIES AND BUSHES, PEELING BACK,
UNTWINING;

AFTER LIPS AND TONGUE HAD CLEANED AND DRIED AND TIDIED HER;
HER PARTS AND PLACES;

AFTER,
AND WHILE THE PUNGENCY OF OUR SLIPPERY LAST TWO HOURS CRUSTED,
DELICIOUS ON MY FACE;

AFTER,
WHILE MY FINGERS, COMBING,

UNFOLDED HER PARTING LIPS IN AN ECHO, REMEMBERING...

REMEMBERING AFTER.

REMEMBERING THE LAST WORDS MY MOTHER GAVE, SENDING ME OFF
TO 16TH AND HAAK...

PUSHING ME,
SNUFFLING, SHUFFLING
THROUGH THE BROWNSTONE ARCH INTO THE REST OF MY LIFE...

BEFORE LETTING GO, A LITTLE BIT, FOREVER...

REMEMBERING MY MOTHER'S LAST SUGGESTION,

TUCKING, WETTING BACK THE COWLICK TUFT,
TURNING ME ROUND AND ROUND AT THE WHIRLWIND BORDER

WHERE OUR STREET DELINED THE PLAYLOT PIPES AND CHAINS,
ITS BILLION BRUSHBURNS WAITING

POTENTIAL, NOW, IN SLICK BLACK AND BUBBLY ASPHALT REDOLENCE
IN SEPTEMBER SUMMER REMNANT HOT AND BRIGHT.

REMEMBERING OUR FINAL LANGUAGE LESSON. THIS:

> IF YOU HAVE TO GO
> SAY NUMBER ONE OR NUMBER TWO.
> NUMBER ONE IS TO TINKLE
> NUMBER TWO IS TO MAKE YOUR UGLIES.
> THEY WON'T KNOW THOSE WORDS. OUR WORDS.
> THOSE WORDS ARE OURS.

REMEMBER: NUMBER ONE IS TO TINKLE
NUMBER TWO IS TO MAKE YOUR UGLIES.
YOU REMEMBER?

THIS GETS COMPLICATED BUT YOU HAVE TO LEARN SOMETIME

I WAS A QUIET KID. SHELTERED, PERHAPS...
BY THE MOUNTAIN IN OUR YARD...

BY THE BOOKS BENEATH MY BED...
BY THE OPERA, SATURDAYS...

BY MOTHER, NANNA, POP-POP AND DADDY.

AND IN MY TURN, I SHELTERED THEM FROM WHAT I WAS AND COULD BECOME.

BUT THIS IS THE WAY IT WAS:

THE COLORED GIRL -- BRENDA -- IN OUR CLASS WAS GOING TO HAVE A BABY.

HEAD DOWN, SILENT IN HER SIDE ROW, BACK-OF-THE-ROOM SEAT
WHILE WE GIGGLED BY HER LAST FEW DAYS WITH US,
THEN GONE.

GONE BACK TO THE PLACE WHERE THE ORPHANS LIVED.

ONE BLOCK UP, ONE BLOCK OVER. THE HOME, WE CALLED IT.
1010 CENTER AVENUE, MRS. FEINERFROCK CALLED IT.

SIXTH GRADE AND GOING TO HAVE A BABY!

"WHAT," MOTHER ASKED SUDDEN AND SLOW THAT EVENING, AFTER DINNER,
DADDY AT THE PAPER, JUST FINGERS AND LEGS ON THE COUCH,

"WHAT...WOULD YOU DO IF SHE SAYS YOU ARE HER BABY'S FATHER?"

OH, GOD! OH, GULP!

GOD GULPING NOT AT FATHERING BRENDA'S BABY...
THAT WAS SILLY...

IT WAS MY MOTHER'S SLIDE ACROSS THE FLOOR TOWARD ME, WHICH GOD-ENGULPED ME.

HER PLIE INTO THE SEAT NEXT TO MINE
AND HER PURR... "OH, PUGGY. YOU HAVE TO KNOW THE FACTS OF LIFE SOMETIME!"

IN FACT I KNEW THEM.

THAT LAST SUMMER --
COUSIN FRED, UP FROM CHESTER, FOR THE YEARLY MELD OF FAMILY

KIDS --

OURS -- ME!
AND AUNT EDWINA 'N UNCLE JIM'S -- BARBARA, FRED AND GAIL --
THE GERMANS...

COUSIN FRED BROKE MY LIFE ONE DAY THAT SUMMER
TOLD THE TALE THAT DAY, ON THE WAY FROM THE MATINEE...

HOW DADDY AND MOMMY DID IT --
AND WHY!

"YOU KNOW WHERE -- DOWN THERE -- YOU HAVE YOUR THING?
WELL, DOWN THERE SHE DOESN'T HAVE THAT. HASN'T GOT IT.

DOWN 'ROUND THE BELLY BUTTON SHE'S GOT NOTHING..."

"SHE?"

"YOUR MOTHER. LESS THAN NOTHING. A HOLE DOWN THERE.
AND WHEN YOU'RE IN LOVE YOU PUT IT THERE..."

"IN THERE!"

"AND MOVE AROUND AND BACK AND FORTH AND PRETTY SOON
IT FEELS REAL GOOD..."

"IN THAT HOLE DOWN THERE?"

"FEELS SO GOOD THEY SOON BEGIN TO HUG AND KISS."

"THEY DO?"

"THEY DO. AND THEN THEY HAVE A BABY, LATER."

"HAVE A BABY BECAUSE THEY LOVE EACH OTHER?"

"BECAUSE IT FEELS REAL GOOD," HE SAID.
HE SAID, "THEY DO IT FOR FUN IS WHY."

FOR FUN!

I AM FOR FUN.
I!

FOR ONE PUMP AND STROKE OF FUN.
I!

WITH HIS THING, HIS TINKLER THING.
AND HER THING, NO THING.
I!

I AM.

NOW, TINKLER FUN I KNEW.

IT GETS COMPLICATED BUT YOU HAVE TO LEARN SOMETIME
THE SECRET.

SIXTEENTH AND HAAK. KINDERGARTEN. FIRST DAY...
NUMBER ONE AND NUMBER TWO DAY...

"NO, UH, LARRY," SHE SAID, "LARRY IS IT? ISN'T IT LARRY?"
NOT NOW, LARRY. YOU HAVE TO WAIT 'TIL WE ALL CAN GO."

"DISCIPLINE," SHE SAID THIS LITTLE LADY PERSON,

THIS LEAN YOUNG LITTLE LADY, NOT MY MOTHER, NOT AN AUNT NOR NANNA
THIS LADY SUDDENLY SUPREME, WITH POWER, COMPLETE, OVER NUMBER ONE
AND NUMBER TWO,

WE'D ALL GO TOGETHER. AT ONE TIME...SHE SAID.

AND THEN, LATER. FOREVER LATER...
IN ROWS DOWN THE HALL TO THE PLACE OF BOYS, THE PLACE OF GIRLS.

SIXTEEN BOYS.
ALL TOGETHER IN THAT PLACE. THE LAVA-TORY.

EIGHT AT THE TROUGH, THE OTHER EIGHT WAITING, BEHIND.

WATER-SWEATED PIPES DRIPPING...TRICKLING AND,
YES,

TINKLING...DOWN THE ZINC-EY SIDES OF WHERE HALF THE BOY-HALF
NUMBER ONED TOGETHER, GIGGLING...

EIGHT ALPHABETIZED BOYS, WAITING OUR TIME, BEHIND,

WAITING TO THE LIQUID HISS AND BUBBLE, IN BOUNCING TUMMY PAIN AND
KIDNEY POP.

SIXTEEN BOYS A'GIGGLE, TINKLERS A'HAND, DOING OR WAITING...
NUDGING, SPLASHING, SPRAYING...

'TIL ONE, WHO COULD NOT WAIT, NUDGED BETWEEN AND WET HIS NEIGHBOR

AND THE NEIGHBOR WETTED HIM,
THEN THEY, THEIR NEIGHBORS BOTH, THEY WETTED...

TIL BACK ROW, WAITING, COULD WAIT NO LONGER AND WADED IN TO THE
TINKLER PARTY...

WAVING ALOFT OR LOW, FENCING, JOUSTING...
BALLISTIC ARCS, TRAJECTORIES, DEAD-EYE SHOTS,

SOAKING SPRINKLES GANGED ON FATTY STEVIE HARTRANFT HOLDING US
BACK WITH ACK-ACK BURSTS AND LAUGHS

SHOE SOAKS, SOCKS SEEPED THROUGH,
PANTS AND SHIRTS...

UNTIL OUR LEAN YOUNG LITTLE LADY, SHE WHO WAS NOT OUR MOTHER,
BLEW WIDE THE DOOR AND WONDERED JUST WHAT WE THOUGHT WE DID?

AND MARCHED US, DRIPPING, PAST THE CRISP GIRLS, WAITING.
MARCHED US, LAUGHING, PAST THE DRY GIRLS, GIGGLING.

THAT WAS TINKLER FUN.

BUT THIS OTHER THIS.
THIS THIS FROM WHERE I CAME!
GETS COMPLICATED BUT YOU HAVE TO LEARN SOMETIME!

IT ALL MADE SENSE.

THE NIGHTS LOST IN MY BED, TURNED BY DARK AND TERROR, CRAWLING
DOWN THE HALL TO MY PARENTS ROOM ON HANDS AND KNEES

OR ON TUMMY, SHRIVLING PAST THE LONG SIDE HALL TO THE ATTIC WHERE
THE DARK THINGS WAITED...

AND IN THEIR STARLIT ROOM, PULLING DOWN THE TENTED SHEETS
FELL SAFELY SLEEPING ON THEIR FLOOR, BY THEIR FEET.

THEN THEIR ANGER IN THE MORNINGS, FINDING ME THERE, WONDERING...
WONDERING, JUST WHAT DID I THINK I WAS DOING?

QUIET KID. SHELTERED
BY THE MOUNTAIN IN OUR YARD...

PROTECTED BY THE BOOKS BENEATH MY BED...
BY THE OPERA, SATURDAYS...

BY MOTHER, NANNA, POP-POP AND DADDY.

THEN...OH, PUGGY! YOU HAVE TO KNOW THE FACTS OF LIFE SOMETIME!

AND I RAN, RAN TO MY ROOM, AND CLOSED ME IN
AND SHELTERED THEM FROM WHAT I WAS AND COULD BECOME.

TIL I KILLED THEM, ONE BY ONE,
THEN, BIT BY BIT,

BECAME THEM, ALL.

MAGICS

TO LIST THE MAGICS...
CLOSE AT HAND WERE:

RUBBER BANDS
AND LENGTHS OF CLOTHESLINE ROPE --
THE BRAIDED KIND, NOT THE PLASTIC STUFF WHICH,
WEATHERED, RUSTY, BROKE

STRING AND WIRE.
A CANDLE'S END.

A HANDKERCHIEF OR BETTER YET
A THROWN OUT SHEET.

AN OATMEAL TUBE, A WHITE OWL BOX, PRINCE ALBERT TIN

AN ORANGE CRATE, ONE ROLLER SKATE.
AN ESSO MAP OF A DISTANT PLACE.

SOME EMPTY SPOOLS. SOME RAILROAD SPIKES.

REAL TOOLS,
STRAIGHT NAILS, RIGHT SIZED BOLTS AND UNSTRIPPED SCREWS.

AND TOPSY, BLIND, WHO WALKED REMEMBERED PATTERNS THROUGH AUNT FLORENCE' LABYRINTH OF SLENDER WOODS AND CHATTER CHILL-GLASS CRITTERS

AND NEVER SHIVERED ONE, NOT ONE, TO PIECES ON THE FLOOR.

NOW FURTHER OFF, BUT NEAR:
THE NEIGHBORHOOD --
ITS SHAPE AND PLACES

HOLES AND COVERS,

THORNS AND TURTLES, WITCHES, WONDERS

THE SPACE BETWEEN US.
US WITHIN THE SPACE.

THE SCHOOL, THE YARD, THE NIGHT.

AND FURTHER YET:
THE MOUNTAIN, OUR HORIZON.

THE RIVER COMING IN FROM WHEN? AND GOING OUT WHERE?

THE ROADS ADVANCING THROUGH, AROUND US.

THE RAILWAY YARDS AND LINES ASSEMBLING IN THE TOWN,
DIVERGING OUT FOREVER.

THE PLANES WHICH FLEW SO HIGH ABOVE AS TO BE BEYOND A WISH.

AND THE BELLS AT MIDNIGHT IN THE ECHO TOWN BELOW.

MORE DISTANT YET WERE
JUNGLES, NATIVES;
CARAVANS AND DESERTS;

DISTANT TEMPLES, ANGRY GODS.

THE TUMBLING TUMMULT OF THE WATERS' FALL
OUT WEST, UP NORTH OR
FAR AWAY IN AFRICA.

CANYONS, VELDT, SAVANAH,
STEPPE AND TUNDRA.

TALLER THAN OUR LIVES, THE TREES
IN FAR-OFF FORESTS, DEEPER THAN OUR DEATHS.

AND BEYOND:
THE FRONDS AND FERNS AND TRILOBITES.
BRONTOSAUR, TRICERATOP;

THE MOON AND MARS
FAR ANTARES AND

THE PAST. THE FUTURE. AND A PLAN

WERE MAGICS, ALL, AND OURS.

IN THE ATTIC

ANOTHER PICTURE I REMEMBERED,
REMEMBER STILL...

MOTHER THERE, ALONE. A CHILD, OH FIVE OR SIX. STANDING BY A STOOL, A PIANO STOOL.

PLEATED GRAY, A MIST BEHIND HER
AND A POTTED FERN BESIDE. HER NAME WAS FERN, YOU SEE.

AND HER. ALONE. STANDING, STARING THROUGH THE PICTURE, UP AHEAD. YEARS AHEAD, AT ME.

AND HER, ALONE, ABOUT TO CRY, TO BREAK, BUT STILL A SMILE ON TOP. BUT THAT WAS HER. OF COURSE.

"WHY DO YOU LOOK SO SAD?" I ASKED.

"I DIDN'T KNOW," SHE SAID. "I THOUGHT THAT WHEN YOU HAD A PICTURE TAKEN
THAT YOU WOULD <u>BE</u> NO MORE. THAT AFTER THAT, I WOULDN'T BE!"

NOW, THE MUSEUM OF MY PARENT'S LIVES
HELD NO EXHIBIT OF MY FATHER'S DAYS ALONE.

OUR ATTIC WAS A RECORD OF MY MOTHER'S LIFE AND BRINGING UP,
PHOTOGRAPHS AND BROWNING BOOKS WITH FADING WAXY ORANGE SCRAWLS,

AND WOOLY, MOTHBALL-PUNGENT CLOTHING...
HER KILTS AND WIGS AND STIFFLY RUSTLING SKIRTS FROM BALLET CLASS AND OTHER DANCES.

A CERTIFICATE OF PENMANSHIP.

AND PICTURED BACK, HER PARENT'S, THEIRS.
THEIR BROTHERS, SISTERS, AUNTS AND COUSINS BACK AND BACK ON BACK;

POP-POP'S TROPHIES, URNS, MEMORIALS;
NANNA'S TATTING, SHAWLS AND DUST-LACE THINGS...

ALL PILED AND PACKED IN PAINTED BRASS-BOUND TRUNKS OF SPLINTERING WOOD,
LINED WITH YELLOWED PAPER -- POLKA-BLUE BUT FADED DOTS --

WHICH WE PLUNDERED NOW AND THEN FOR HOLIDAYS OR COSTUME TIMES OF YEAR
OR AT OTHER TIMES, FOR FUN,

TO BANGLE OUT IN RAUCOUS BEADS AND MARBLE PEARLS ON DRYING STRING,
A CROWN OR SAVAGE CHARM...

BUT OF MY FATHER, NOTHING.

THINGS OF THEIRS, YES; THEIR TOGETHER THINGS.
OLD CLOTHES AND HATS NOW CHARMING, DUMB OR CRUNCHED AND FLAKING DECADES BACK.

AND PICTURES, THERE, FROM "ON THE ROAD" -- THEY SAID,
FROM WHEN THEY DANCED FROM TOWN TO TOWN ALL DOWN THE COAST, AND BACK

"WHEN YOU RAN AWAY." POP-POP LAUGHED, "TO JOIN THE CIRCUS."
AND LAUGHED AGAIN.

WHERE SHE MET MY FATHER. THEN MARRIED HIM.
THOSE THINGS, YES.

PICTURES OF MY MOTHER-SWAN REACHING UP ON TOES,
HER HELMET HAIR IN MOLDED CURLS, REACHING ON BEYOND THE PICTURE'S EDGE...
FROM A BOOK-TO-BE CALLED, "FERN" SHE SAID. A BOOK WHICH NEVER WAS.

OR THEM ON SOUTHERN BEACHES OR FURTHER SOUTH IN FLORIDA,
A PYRAMID OF PERFECT FORM, OF BODIES PERFECT TO THE SUN AND SAND.

MOTHER, FATHER, OTHERS, FRIENDS...
THOSE SPOKEN OF THE TIMES I HID MY EARS AND WOULD NOT HEAR OF BEING "ON THE ROAD" IN DANCE...

BUT OF MY FATHER, HIS LIFE BEFORE,
A NOTHING, THERE, TO SEE OR HOLD.

OF HIS CHILDHOOD...NOTHING. HIS PARENTS -- NOW BOTH DEAD WHOM I HARDLY KNEW -- NOTHING. OF HIS BROTHERS, SISTERS...NOT A THING.

NOR AUNTS AND UNCLES, THOSE OLD SMALL PEOPLE
GLIMPSED THERE AND THEN IN CHURCH, AT FUNERALS, MOSTLY,

THE DISTANT ONES ACROSS THE ROOM IN TEARS, NODDING TO SOME SORROW I COULD NOT FEEL, IN BLACK AND WAILING WRINKLED SKIN

AND HUSKING, VOICED THE NAME OF HE OR SHE NOW GOING, GONE.
ROUNDING IT WITH ANOTHER TONGUE, ANOTHER SPEECH...
SOMETHING I WOULD NEVER SPEAK.

NOT EVER. NEVER SPEAK NOR KNOW...

OF THESE, THE MUSEUM OF MY PARENTS HOUSE HAD NOT ONE ARTIFACT OR TOUCH.

NOTHING OF MY FATHER'S LIFE ALONE. NOT A THING AT ALL

I WONDERED WHY...

DANCER

MY MOTHER WROTE MY SHAME ON THE FLOOR WITH HER TOES.

THE GUYS WERE AROUND

PLAYING.

TAKING APART MY TRAINS

WHEN MOTHER CAME IN FLOWING.

FLOATING.

DRIFTING LIKE A FINGERTIP ACROSS MY LIPS.

OH MY GOD!

OH, JE-SUS CHRIST!

IN PIROUETTES!

THE MAIN THING

"THIS IS THE MAIN THING," IS WHAT POP-POP SAID, LAST,
LOOKING AT ME,

HE, A-DWINDLE IN THE SHEETS, TUBED TO THE BED BELOW; THE LONG
CHAIN LAMP DUSTING DOWN FROM CEILINGS
PLASTER BROWN, AND PAINTED SAINTS AROUND.

EYES, BRUSHBURNED HOLES IN HIS FACE, THINNER, NOW THAN WHEN I
LOOKED LAST, THAT FACE.

WHILE NUNS AND NURSES SLUMBERED PAST
BLACK AND WHITE IN THE HALLS BEYOND, WHERE I WAITED,
WAITING TO LISTEN AT LAST.

WHERE ALL THE WOMEN GATHERED ROUND, MY MOTHER, HIS DAUGHTER, HIS
OTHER DAUGHTERS, MY AUNTS, WATCHING HIM.

WAITING. WAITING FOR HIM TO GO.

EYES CLUTCHING ONE ANOTHER, HANDS TOUCHING, HOLDING HIM
OR NUDGING FURTHER TOWARD HIS GOING OUT...

GOING OUT LIKE A BALLOON ON A HEADBOARD, GOING OUT LIKE A FINGER
'CROSS THE CHEEK.

GOING OUT LIKE DUSK, GOING OUT LONG LAST.

"THIS IS THE MAIN THING," IS WHAT POP-POP SAID AT ME.

WHILE

HANDS -- ALL KNUCKLES, NOW -- WAVED INWARD TOWARD HIMSELF
AND OUT.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THING?

WHAT?

WELL, THERE WAS CARSONIA PARK...

THROUGH THE SMILING CLOWN MOUTH

IN THE MORNING, IN THE EVENING...

WATER SLAPPING THE WOODEN DRUM, THE BOAT.
EVENRUDE PUTTER IN THAT DRY ROT HOLE

AIN'T WE GOT FUN?

POP-POPING OUT, THAT WOODEN HOLE SHOVING THE BLACK NIGHT WATER
ASIDE, POP-POP AND I.

ON SHORE, BUMPING BACKWARD, THE MIDWAY BRIGHTS, STEEL HISS AND SHRIEK OF THE ROLLER COASTER,

MACHINERY DRAWN AND SKETCHED BY LIGHTS.

BULLET TUMBLING, DRAGGING IT'S FLAME BEHIND, CATCHING ITSELF IN THE CIRCLE, SNIFFING ITS TAIL.

DRIFTING BACK, THE WOMEN ON THE SHORE, HOPEFUL IN THE EVENING. THANK GOODNESS, THIS WAS THE LAST THING, THIS DAY. THANK GOODNESS.

WAVING THEIR HANDS AT US SETTING MANFULLY FORTH ON CARSONIA LAKE.

PUGGY, HE SAID AT LAST, IN OUR HOLE IN THE WATER. NOW, PUGGY. YOU REMEMBER THIS SOMETIME.

NOW, I'D HAD A BAD DAY.

THE WOMEN! MOTHER, NANNA, THE PORTLY AUNTS -- IDA AND EDWINA!

WHAT'S THE POINT OF CARSONIA PARK? TO COME AND LOOK OR BE WHIZZING SCARED TO BUMPY DEATH!

I DIDN'T ASK. I KNEW, OF COURSE: THE FEARS.
THE FEARS OF COURSE!

OF FALLING LIKE A MEAT BALLOON,
AND GROUND LIKE BURGER IN THE RUSTY COGS,

OR OVERSHOT, IN AN ARC...ALOFT FOREVER OR DWINDLING OFF
WHILE MOTHER SHRIEKED AND POINTED

WHILE THE PORTLY AUNTS HUGGED SO LONG AND TIGHT THEY FRIED TOGETHER IN THE SAWDUST SAND.

WHILE NANNA CLICKED AND SHOOK HER HEAD, I TOLD HIM SO...
I TOLD HIM THIS WOULD HAPPEN.

THAT WAS THE POINT OF CARSONIA PARK.

NOW THIS IS WHAT I'D DONE!

MY WEIGHT WAS GUESSED. CORRECTLY. AND MY AGE, ONE YEAR OFF. TOO YOUNG.

I'D TOSSED -- AND MISSED -- THREE WOODEN RINGS,
AT THE NECKS OF GREEN-GLASS BOTTLES.

I'D BEEN TAKEN -- <u>TAKEN</u> -- ON THE CAROUSEL.
BEEN SAT, AND BELTED, HUGGED AND NURTURED.

PADDED BETWEEN IDA AND EDWINA UPON A BENCH. THE SWAN I THINK.
WHILE EVERYWHERE THE BRASS AND WOODEN HORSES PUMPED

ALL OTHERS, LEANING OUT AND DOWN AT THE SWIRLY WORLD

'TIL NANNA, MOTHER, POP-POP, ALL, BUTTERED AND BLED TOGETHER IN THE RING-A-LING THUNDER CLASH AND BRASH OF CALLIOPE STEAM AND SYMBOLS.

NO ROLLER COASTER. NO BULLET. NO BUMP CARS.

ALMOST...
ALMOST...THE OLD MILL HOUSE OF HORRORS.

UNTIL, MOTHER, LISTENING AT THE CREAKS AND MOANS, THE SLAP POCK WATER AS THE BOATS CAME BUMPING OUT,

'TIL MOTHER, SQUINTING AT THE SOUNDS BENEATH THE ROUND BASS THRUM OF MILLWHEEL CREAK AND GROAN, THE SHRIEKS OF KIDS, OF LOVERS

UNTIL MOTHER, LAST, BELOW IT ALL. DETECTED THERE THE VOICE OF RATS.

"PUGGY," HE SAID IN OUR WOODEN HOLE IN THE WATER. "PUGGY, YOU'LL REMEMBER THIS SOMETIME.

"THE HANDS WILL HOLD YOU BACK. THE BONY FINGERS, FLESH, THE FLESH OF WOMEN'S HANDS. CARSONIA PARK'S FOR YOU, NOT THEM.
NOT FOR THE BONY HANDS."

AND THERE, AT HIS LAST, I REMEMBERED IT.

THIS IS THE MAIN THING. WHAT?

WELL, HIS STORIES, THEY WOULD BE GONE FOREVER?
FOREVER, IF I DID NOT TELL THEM; GONE?

HIS DAYS, THOSE HORSE AND BUGGY DAYS WHEN HE AND ABNER AND ISRAEL, HIS BROTHERS, WHEN HE AND THEY PLAYED HALLOWE'EN

AND TOOK TO PIECES THEIR NEIGHBOR'S CART AND CARRIED IT ABOVE TO THE STABLE ROOF,

REASSEMBLED IT THERE FOR MORNING.
THAT?

WELL, THERE **WAS** THAT CHRISTMAS...

FEASTS AND PRESENTS.
UNCLES AND AUNTS AND COUSINS MOUSING FORTH TO OUR HOUSE.

HIS HOUSE -- OURS!
ROUND WITH SMELLS OF ROASTING BIRD AND CRANBERRY SAUCE,

BULGED WITH ONIONS IN WHITE WHEAT AND BUTTER GRAVY.

POP-POP, THERE, THE FOUNDER OF THE FEAST, DWINDLED BY HIS FAMILY,

IN HIS HOUSE, OUR HOUSE,

POP-POP SIFTED AMONG US, THERE, AND SHOWED US ALL HIS GIFTS,
AFRAID THAT WE HAD MISSED -- NOT NOTICED THEM...

THE WINE NO ONE WOULD DRINK,

THE BOOKS I ALREADY HAD
AND, OF COURSE, HAD READ BY THEN.

AND THE WHISPERS IN THE KITCHEN

THE WHISPERS OF THE WOMEN, MY MOTHER, HER SISTERS SHAKING HEADS,
AND CLICKING KITCHEN TONGUES.

"HE'LL BE OFF TO HER, TONIGHT. HE WILL!"

SHAKING HEADS, CLICKING TONGUES...

"I REMEMBER MOTHER WEEPING AS HE DROPPED A DOLLAR IN HER LAP,
PASSING."

SHAKING HEADS, CLICKING TONGUES.
YES.

AND WHEN HE PASSED FROM THE HOUSE -- AS PREDICTED IN THE KITCHEN
-- NO ONE NOTICED.

BUT NOW, THIS, THIS WAS THE MAIN THING, THIS.

THIS IS THE MAN, I TOLD MYSELF, WAS CUT FROM HIS WEDDING PICTURE
THE MAIN THING? THAT?

FACE AND SKIN HISSING IN TOWARD BONE BENEATH,
THE BONE BENEATH YEARNING TO PEEL OUTWARD INTO THE ROOM,
INTO THE PAST FOREVER.

EYES BULGING.
EYES BULGING WHICH READ TO ME SEATED ON HIS LAP,

SEATED ON HIS LAP ON THE GLIDER ON OUR PORCH

AND I, OH, THREE OR FOUR, EYED HIS FINGER FLOW THE PAGE, THE
WORDS,

AND DREAMED HIS FINGER BIRTHED THE WORLDS WHICH DAWNED ALIVE
BEHIND MY EYES...
BELFRY ARCHES, MUFFLED OARS; MIDDLESEXES, VILLAGE AND FARMS.

"THIS IS THE MAIN THING," POP-POP SAID, AT LAST. TO ME.
WHO HAD KILLED HIS WIFE, MY NANNA, OH, YEARS AGO, NOW.

"THIS IS THE MAIN THING," POP-POP SAID, LAST AS THE WOMEN WAITED
FOR HIM TO GO.

NO. **THIS** IS THE MAIN THING. WAVING LIKE A FLAME IN BREATH.

THEN GONE.

TAKE POP-POP'S HAND SOMEONE SAID, GO ON.

NO I SAID. NO. AND WENT.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Note: The following is an excerpt, and the beginning, of a much longer piece. Space restricted us from printing it all; nostalgia stopped us from deleting entirely.—ed.

Just before daybreak I lay my head on my pillow and my booted feet are cold at the bottom of the sofa, and all the fine young ladies are back in their beds for their mornings, and the wine has turned to vinegar on my breath and in my glass and in my mouth and in my stomach, and, if I could see it at this time, in my mind as well—just before night-breaking day I turn off the light and lay my head down. The room, ten feet by ten, is dark, and I suppose that I am finally alone.

But once again the night does not end with the light. Through the green curtained window in the corner of my bed the red dims up and moves slowly down the shelves of books and papers on the wall across the room. Down the wall it goes leaving the mud red and green phosphorescence glowing brighter and brighter on **Walt Whitman** and **The Infernal Machine** and **The Tablets of Sumer** and **The Primer of Formal Logic**. And suddenly it is another morning in another room. And there, glowing red in that morning's sun, is Terry Hebhart and our own small war.

"It must be summer," I think, "If it was winter we would be going to school, and we're not, so it must be summer." It was summer; I wasn't going to Fifth and Spring that day, and my light short pajamas were wet with the sweat of our house which was not air conditioned and which was on Fourth Street. I am eleven today. Yes, then it is summer and near its end too. So now all the days must be used with ever so much care, never wasted in sleeping late or reading in books with no pictures till noon spells our day—Terry's and mine—into late afternoon, early evening, bad time, breaths of days.

Now morning is on our back porch, damp with its green and blue bird waking breath drying the damp small hairs on the side of my head. And there, six back yards away and across the alley is Terry, drying his hair and eyes on his back porch.

Our gate, wooden framed and wire bodied, never to be opened because the last time you did, you let it open and the dog got out and we had to drive all the way out to the humane society and pick him up and it cost us two dollars, is leaped over in three moves long practiced: right foot on bottom, left foot on top, and push over with both hands and arms. Then that split second hanging in mid air till the concrete alley whip-cracks the whole bottom of my feet, and I am running one, two, three, four, five, six back yards up, and there is Terry standing, the whole bottoms of his both feet whip-cracked on the concrete.

"Today's my birthday," I said, "I'm eleven."

That was right, it was September 2, 1953. It was only on September 2nds that I remembered that September 2nd was my birthday. Once, on a very shameful night, when I joined the Cub Scouts, I had to run all the way home to ask my mother when my birthday was, because I had forgotten and they needed to know before they would let me be a Cub.

"So? Bob Ott and Dave Brown and Dave McAllister and Joey and Dave McDermott and I are going to have a war today. Do you want to play?"

"You going to be in Korea?"

"I don't know. Where do you think it ought to be?"

This was the way all our wars started on Fourth Street. The real war in the real world was decided not by us, but on Fourth Street our wars were carefully selected plastic and rubber and firecracked battles which lasted till lunch and then to supper and then to bed and there fought till the next day when all the dead chose sides again.

"I don't know, we fought Japs yesterday. I don't want to be a Jap again." Somehow, by choice always, Terry and I, and sometimes Bob Ott, and sometimes Missy and Trissy Fritz, were the enemy—always. And always if the enemy was small and yellow and slant-eyed, we were Japs. Nations meant nothing to us on Fourth Street.

"Let's be Jerries and fight in the jungle," I said, and we were. I "I'll'ed Hitler all the way back to my yard, and "Schwinehunted" over our fence and "I'll"ed to our kitchen where mother made me eat the Cheerios.

My mother and father had gotten me, among the finger warming and ear saving, buttoning and zippering up the front, wrapping at the chin, pulling over the shoes and clipping up the legs with hot hurting red sides of fingers, useless presents, a Matel Burp Gun, a very useful, noisy, present soon to be taken away for firing it in old man Hoover's forbidden yard at his forbidden window at his yellow-wrinkled face. And of course, I knew of all of these things days before.

"It's my birthday," I said.

"Do you want to wait till daddy gets home from work to open your presents, or do you want to open them now?"

This was the test of my gratitude for eleven years of Fourth Street. I couldn't open them all, of course. Daddy had bought them by working for them, I just lived there and every birthday and Christmas they gave me presents. But the Jerries needed that burp-gun.

"Well—could I open just one of them now?"

"I'll open the rest when daddy gets home."

This kind of compromise usually pleased my mother and since the Christmas buying was only a few months away it ensured good feelings at Pomeroy's when we, the three of us, went to the sixth floor toy department.

The boxes were hidden well—in the usual places. When they were arranged on the living-room floor, the Matel Burp Gun was in the small boy with non-descript puppy playing with a red ball in a blue and green grassed field wrapped package, I went from box to box picking and shaking each one, then cautiously and shyly picked the one with my finger.

"Open it," my mother would smile from above.

And it was the gun, and I thanked my mother with a hug and kiss and ran, "I'll"ing all the concrete and wooden gated and concrete way back to Terry's yard.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

When the Cheerios and juices of early September second morning were put away until tomorrow, when they must be eaten slower because it wasn't your birthday then, it was nearly ten o'clock. Wars on Fourth Street started at ten o'clock.

"I'll Hitler!" I said to Terry who always shot back with an "I'll" all of his own with an unbeatable whump-whack crack of the heels of his sneakers.

"Did you choose up yet? Look what I got!"

"Do you have any shootin' crackers for it?"

I didn't have any, and usually didn't because parents never could quite realize that noise—the loud noise of shooting crackers and shouts and pains of scuffed knees, and rolling box topped wagon-tanks—is as much a part of the war game as Josy and David and Dave and Missy and Trissy and Terry and I and the Matel Burp Gun.

"No, I don't have any, but that's alright because it makes a noise anyway when you wind it up," and I showed him and it did and we were pleased because now we had a silencer and could kill—in silence.

"Did you choose up yet?"

"No, Joey and David are still eating, and Missy and Trissy can't come out today. Dave McAllister'll be out soon, I don't know about the others. They'll be out soon though, I guess."

It was late on one of the last summer mornings of that September when all the fine young men banded together in the back alley of our homes on Fourth Street for one of the last battles of that warm morning wind dying year.

Yes, the tank was to be used that day because soon the early walks to Fifth and Spring grade school would begin, and our hair would dry in the small, square, green-walled, and black tar floored world of Mrs. Feinerfrock and her multiplication tables which you never will learn, and the tank took at least an hour to put together, and you couldn't do that after school because you had to try, at least to learn Mrs. Feinerfrock's numbers. But now we had the time, and both sides of the war helped drag the scuff-maroon wagon from our cellar, and then to find the Motorola T.V. box with the small square hole on top in Terry's cellar—being very careful not to wake Terry's father who worked nights and slept lightly on the second floor and who was very mean early in our mornings that were his evenings. Then we all looked for rope.

Rope was important to us. It was something which parents used to build our world. It was a force in my life because it was a part of the late afternoon, late summer tent that my father made in our back yard; it was part of the swing my father made for me when I was just seven and very light, which got lower and lower before it broke and I roll fell to the dirt between the back porch and the washline pole. Then I picked myself up and found the broken end of the rope, which was limp and grey, and found that it was very soft and fluffy, and that if you pulled at it, small tufts of downy hair held, then came free, then, if you blew on it, drifted high up to where the birds were, and was gone.

This was the magic touch of rope to us. Now, when we could find some, and we always did, it would be used to hold the hole-topped box to the maroon wagon, and by our hands, and our rope, we made our tank.

The tank was Jerry that day. Sometimes it was Jap, sometimes, because I had seen Rocketship X-M, it was Martian, but always it was Terry's and Mine. And always it was built by all of us around the one inside.

If I was in the tank it was this way: You sat in the open wagon and the Big Motorola T.V. box was placed over your head, and it got suddenly very

dark and very warm and the voices of Terry and Joey and David and all the other late morning sounds of Fourth Street's alley got hollow and distant and you were all of a sudden very alone. Then the rope! And then the tying, and every knot that drew the rope tight around the box drew the top down closer to your head and the sides further out till the light from the white, pebble-dusted, knee-scraping alley floor shone up through the space between the wagon metal and ripple sided cardboard bottom of the box. The knots squeaked tight, and you were in.

Then the choosing that I couldn't be part of because I had chosen the tank-side.

Terry would have been on our side. Yes, that was the way of it, and probably David McAllister, too. Joey and David McDermot, who were as inseparable as their names—they were always "Joey 'n David"—would probably be on the other side, which was always called the "Americans". There were so many wars on Fourth Street that the details of this particular war are lost. So are the numbers and names of the fighters of our side. So are the weapons—except for the tank and Matel Burp Gun. So are the exact places of the fighting—except that it probably centered around Harold Darwin's Fourth Street facing front yard, and Old man Hoover's back yard, and The Triplets', whose names I will now probably never know, back yard, and Clinton Neewig's yard, which was next to ours, or around the corner of the alley which ran down to Madison Avenue which ran into Douglas Street which ran uphill, past Missy and Trissy's house, and into Fourth street.

If the details are forgotten, the rules never will be, because the rules were always the same. The two armies— ours was usually about ten, the "Americans" about nine or eight, because, the "Americans" had to fight against greater odds, which meant that they usually lost—the two armies would split up for ten minutes, then hide, then hunt each other down—on Fourth Street, in the back alleys, on Madison Avenue, in the close and dark warmed passages between houses, in the delicately kept and cloths grabbing rose arched lawn of Old Man Hoover, until one army or the other was killed or called in for lunch or supper or bed. Each man when killed had to wait ten minutes before he could play again. If in that time the rest of his army was killed or captured, the war was over and one side was the winner. If it wasn't he could fight again—sometimes alone—until one side or the other was destroyed. It was usually hard to determine exactly who was dead when, because we could never tell when you hit or missed a man. Since our bullets consisted mostly of "dow, dow, you're dead, Terry" or Joey 'n David, or Dave, or Bob, arguments always broke out among the fighters; Terry swearing that he had shot Dave right in the head, Dave overlapping Terry that he was at best only wounded, and could keep fighting and that he had probably gotten Terry before he had been shot anyway.

As our days got hotter, our wars grew older and our sounds became more and more and more the voices of small wild hush-breaking animals.

And here my parents ask me at warm supper nights. "What do you do with the wagon, and that big box?"

"The tank? Why that's a tank. I just sit in it, and Terry pulls it down the alley. I'm inside it, and then he lets it go, and we roll down the alley to Madison Avenue and Joey and David, and Bob Ott, and Missy and Trissy throw stones at it, and the wagon handle drags on the alley and at the bottom of the hill we turn over. I like the noise of the stones," I say, "it sounds real."

"What do you mean," they say "real?"

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"Like a real war," I say.

"And then?" my father asks.

"Then, I'm dead." I answer with embarrassment because the idea of dying, and growing up, and shaving, and kissing, and dancing, and marrying and having children and living a life apart from Fourth Street, and dying away from here, embarrasses me.

When I was a child, death lasted ten minutes, and while I was dead in the wreck of the tank at the bottom of the alley near Madison Avenue, Terry and all the other Jerries of that time and of that place fought our tee-shirted dirty cellar jungle war for me. And when I was a child when ten minutes had gone by when the sun had gone high over the alley off Fourth Street, I climbed out of the tank and went to join the rest of the battle.

There were old women and old men, too. The old women wore long dresses and lived dark lives in houses apart from the old men, who wore baggy pants and colored and floppy flannel shirts. And all their dark vined and rose stuck back yards were always places where, for some reason never really understandable to us, we didn't belong.

"Go where you belong. Who're your parents; go up and play there, you don't belong here."

Our threats rang in whispered rhymes after their threats: "We'll burn your house, you dirty grouse; We'll burn it down, burn it down, burn it down, then go to town, you dirty grouse." And then, our voices breathing softer and softer from outside the dark brown, turning black, rusting wire fences that kept us from burning the house of the dirty grouse, then we watched the old woman rearrange the vines of the sticker bushes—never being, herself, stuck because she knew where each and every stick-point had been and was now—in exactly the crazy pattern they were in before we had fought there. Then she would turn and look back and we would stand still and whisper, now to ourselves, still holding her gaze, "I'll burn your house you dirty grouse," and she would rustle-hush her long skirted self back into the dark dry door of her back porch, and click was gone forever—until the next time we fought the same battle in the same wrong place.

And despite old men and old women we continued the game, and the noises of Terry killing Joey and my killing David—though it was sometimes, but not often, Joey killing Terry or David killing me—drifted and rolled and bounced down all the light dying day.

There was Terry and I, hiding, dirty and alone in the dark warm cobwebbed passage between two row-houses on Fourth Street. There we waited for the enemy, who whisper and tiptoe watched for us past the passage in which we waited for them. And once past us, we would leap out and the Mattel Burp-Gun would spring click chatter at their backs—we could shoot them in the backs because we were the enemy—and they were dead for ten minutes.

If the wreckage of the tank in the alley marked the beginning of the battle, the mark of the near days end was a small sharp chill when the wet of our tee shirts would suddenly stiffen and grow hard. Then the light would come darker through the trees on Fourth Street, and the white concrete alley would grey and grow, itself, darkly dusty.

We left the wagon and the box at the bottom of the alley because that was a good excuse to go out again after supper. On the way home—my father always called me back from the jungle or Mars or the desert with a single sliding whistle note from the back porch—there were usually black shadowed birds flying in an angle from Fourth Street, across the alley and down toward the trees of Madison Avenue. I think they were

there on my eleventh birthday. I wondered what they had done all the war long day as I three step leaped over the back fence to our yard. I wondered.

"Be careful with the fence. Do you want to break it?"

I still sort of wondered.

"You broke it doing that last week. Be careful with it; if you do it again you and I are really going to tangle."

By then they were gone.

Then there was the going in, and I guess I went into the house before my father because he always liked to stare mad at me as I passed by him ashamed for nearly breaking the gate now and for breaking it last week.

Lawrence P. Santoro

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